

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICERS  
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

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DATE: June 3, 1974

TO: The Director

FROM:

SUBJECT: Status of North Vietnamese Forces in Laos

REMARKS:

Attached per your request is a memorandum on the status of North Vietnamese forces in Laos and the reasons why Hanoi has not withdrawn its troops in accordance with the Lao peace agreement.

The basic inputs to the memorandum were prepared by OER and OCI and coordinated within the Agency.

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Attachment

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## MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

Status of North Vietnamese Forces in Laos

1. The Laos Provisional Government of National Union was established on April 5th, 1974, marking the beginning of the stipulated 60 day period during which all remaining foreign troops were to be withdrawn from Laos. Since early April, all U.S. and Thai forces have withdrawn, but less than 24 hours before the June 4th deadline, North Vietnamese troops on Laotian soil number an estimated 47,000\*, more than three-fourths of which are located in southern Laos (see table below). Of the total, 18,000 are combat troops -- including those in 6 infantry regiments -- and about 29,000 are logistics personnel.

Order of Battle of North Vietnamese Forces in Laos

	<u>Total</u>		<u>North Laos</u>		<u>South Laos</u>	
	Jun 74	Feb 73	Jun 74	Feb 73	Jun 74	Feb 73
TOTAL	<u>47</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>61</u>
COMBAT**	18	37	6	16	12	21
ADMIN SERVICES	29	46	4	6	25	40

\* Includes personnel in antiaircraft units.

\*\* Since the February 1973 Laotian cease-fire our knowledge of Communist forces in Laos has steadily deteriorated. The volume of all source intelligence has dropped off significantly and as a result, we no longer have a timely and complete picture of Communist forces in Laos. Thus, it is possible that some North Vietnamese units may have withdrawn undetected.

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2. At the time of the Laos cease-fire, Hanoi had some 83,000 troops stationed in Laos, with most (61,000) committed to the protection and support of the North Vietnamese logistics system in the Panhandle. Since then, about 36,000 North Vietnamese military personnel have withdrawn from Laos to North Vietnam or to Communist strongholds in South Vietnam, reducing the strength of both combat and administrative services personnel by more than 40 percent. These withdrawals included the entire 316th Infantry Division from northern Laos, three infantry and nine antiaircraft regiments from the panhandle as well as 17,000 engineer and other logistics personnel.

3. There have been tenuous indications that other North Vietnamese logistic units in northern Laos may be withdrawing, but the moves could be part of a traditional rainy season drawdown. In southern Laos, there has been no recent evidence of impending North Vietnamese withdrawals on a permanent basis. Nevertheless, in the next month or so the Communists probably will temporarily withdraw additional rear services troops from the Laotian Panhandle as the rainy season takes full effect and logistic activity is reduced.

4. In any event, Hanoi probably will maintain a sizable military

revealed North Vietnamese troops in the province will be permanently stationed there -- disguised as Pathet Lao (PL). In southern Laos, the logistic corridor is still an integral part of overall North Vietnamese capability to support their forces in South Vietnam, and it is almost certain that Hanoi will not abandon it. The continued maintenance of this system will require a large, permanent manpower commitment.

#### Why the North Vietnamese Remain in Laos

5. There are several reasons for Hanoi's determination to keep substantial numbers of its troops in Laos. The bulk of the North Vietnamese forces serve to support the Communist effort against South Vietnam -- Hanoi's number one priority in Indochina. Hanoi has spent the past year assiduously improving its road and infiltration system in the Lao panhandle, and there is little likelihood of Hanoi abandoning this area as long as the fighting continues in South Vietnam and Cambodia.

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6.. In northern Laos, the North Vietnamese presence enables Hanoi to exercise considerably influence over the PL. It also serves as a hedge against potential rightist military moves against the areas controlled by the PL or the new coalition government itself. Hanoi evidently plans to continue training, advising, and to some extent logistically supporting the PL until the North Vietnamese are convinced that their Lao clients can hold their own against the Lao Army and do reasonably well in future general elections.

7. For their part, the PL have shown no interest in having the North Vietnamese leave. For the time being, at least, a continued North Vietnamese presence is probably welcomed by the PL as protection for their political and military interests in the new coalition government.

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